THE ALAMO SCOUTS

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LESSONS FOR LRSUs

In 1986 the U.S. Army activated its first corps long range surveillance unit (LRSU), which was designed to provide a reliable human intelligence collection resource to division and corps commanders. Today's commanders, as they shepherd *along that fledgling organization, might take a look at some of* the valuable lessons in reconnaissance and surveillance that a group of men known as the Alamo Scouts discovered many years ago. Although the rules of lineage prevent the LRSUs from sharing the proud heritage of the Alamo Scouts—an organization officially designated as the Sixth U.S. Army Special Reconnaissance Unit—these units do share many of *the same characteristics and much of the same spirit.*

The story of the Alamo Scouts begins in the Pacific Theater of World War II. The Japanese offensive had run its course, and had been stopped finally in the jungles of New Guinea. General Douglas MacArthur was about to begin one of the most brilliant campaigns in U.S. military history— he would outflank entire Japanese armies and leave them to "wither on the vine" in a near perfect example of what we now call maneuver warfare.

To help him execute his daring strategy, he asked that an old confidant and subordinate, Lieutenant General Walter Krueger, be assigned to his command. General Krueger, 62 at the time, arrived in Australia on 7 February 1943 and assumed command of the U.S. Sixth Army on 16 February near Brisbane. Many problems faced him and his staff. His troops were scattered over a 2,000-mile area from Melbourne to New Guinea. Malaria was a significant problem, and many of his units were untrained in jungle warfare and amphibious operations— training that was absolutely necessary to the success of future tactical operations in this theater.

One other problem concerned General Krueger: intelligence. If he was to plan, prepare, and execute the numerous amphibious lodgments required for a successful campaign, he had to know where the enemy was and where he was not. Dense jungle frequently reduced the usefulness of aerial reconnaissance, especially in locating enemy troop dispositions and fortifications. Cartographic coverage was almost nonexistent, while the few available maps were generally inaccurate. Naval charts simply did not exist in the coverage and detail that would be necessary to plan and execute amphibious assaults.

Some intelligence was available from Japanese prisoners of war and from a limited number of civilians who had escaped from enemy territory. These sources were generally considered unreliable, however, and a better method of satisfying the Sixth Army's intelligence requirements was needed. These conditions led General Krueger to form a new provisional organization to conduct reconnaissance in advance of Sixth Army operations. On 28 November 1943, his headquarters published an order directing that a scout training center be established before 1 January 1944 to train selected volunteers in raid and reconnaissance work.

ALAMO

General Krueger, a Texan from San Antonio, selected a name for the new organization from his own heritage, a name he had already used to designate his own headquarters the Alamo Force—the Alamo Scouts.

General Krueger selected Colonel Frederick W. Bradshaw of Jackson, Mississippi, to establish the training center; he was to be assisted by a young infantry captain named Gibson Niles. Soldiers were not selected to attend the training course on the basis of their military occupational specialties but on the basis of their individual qualifications of courage, stamina, intelligence, and adaptability. All of the Sixth Army combat units were ordered to send students, and subsequently the rolls of the Alamo Scouts would read like an order of battle roster for the entire Sixth Army. Infantrymen, cavalrymen, engineers, and communicators all could be found in the organization. They were expected to be proficient in the basic subjects before going off to the training center.

Training began for the first group of volunteers—6 officers and 40 enlisted men—on 27 December 1943 on Fergusson Island off the southeast coast of New Guinea. The six-week course was divided into two phases. The first phase consisted of three and one-half weeks of refresher training on scouting, patrolling, map reading, and weapons, including the use of Japanese small arms.

The prospective scouts had to master message writing, radio communication skills, various intelligence skills, and working as members of a team in conducting field reconnaissance. Each scout was thoroughly cross-trained in all team member duties. In addition to basic refresher training in map reading, scouts were given additional work in interpreting aerial photographs, a skill considered critical to navigation in the largely unmapped jungles of the Southwest Pacific.

The scouts also spent many hours mastering the art of operating small rubber boats. To develop the stamina they would need for this and to prepare themselves for the hardships of an extended stay behind enemy lines, physical training became something akin to a religion. It normally occupied about one and one-half hours each day for the first four weeks, with the emphasis on swimming.

The last two weeks of training was given over to practical exercises in the infiltration of teams into hostile areas, reconnaissance operations, and recovery. Each exercise was normally conducted over a period of three nights and two days.

SELECTION PROCESS

The training conducted at the Alamo Scout Training Center also served as a selection process, and not every student who attended was selected to become a Scout. The process itself was based upon peer ratings. For example, each enlisted man was asked to rank the top three officers he would prefer as his team leader on an actual mission. He was also instructed to select five other men to whom he would trust his life on such a mission.

Conversely, each officer was asked to identify the men he would select to accompany him on missions behind enemy lines. Thus, the bonds of mutual respect and trust based upon demonstrated proficiency formed the basis of cohesion within the teams.

This selection process subsequently proved its worth on the numerous lengthy and dangerous independent missions conducted by the Scouts during which mutual respect and self discipline served to keep teams working together well.

For field operations, a team generally consisted of one officer and five enlisted men, at least two of whom were normally noncommissioned officers. In some cases, interpreters and native guides were also attached, depending on the purpose of the mission.

From their inception in 1943 to the successful conclusion of the Philippine campaign in 1945, the Alamo Scouts performed a wide variety of missions for Sixth Army that ranged from static surveillance to limited direct action missions. They worked directly for the Sixth Army G-2, who had overall staff responsibility for all aspects of their training and employment.

Reconnaissance missions were among the first assigned to the Scouts. The initial one was conducted on 26 February 1944 in the Admiralty Islands. Subsequently, almost every amphibious operation conducted by units of the Sixth Army was preceded by Alamo Scout infiltration and reconnaissance operations. These teams provided valuable information on the beach areas being considered for landings; furnished critical information on the terrain behind the beaches; identified the size, composition, and location of enemy units; located critical enemy installations such as ammunition dumps; and identified any obstacles that might impede friendly maneuver and amphibious assault operations. They also frequently provided engineer reconnaissance of potential or existing airfields.

With the invasion of the Philippine Islands in 1944, Alamo Scout missions became more varied. The Sixth Army was keenly interested in enemy troop movements on both Leyte and Luzon. Given a friendly population and an active guerrilla movement, Alamo Scout teams went ashore and made contact with the guerrillas. With their assistance, the Scouts set up numerous road, trail, and coast watch networks. These networks, supervised and frequently operated by the Scouts themselves, allowed U.S. forces to monitor the movement of Japanese reserve units, to identify major enemy routes, and to estimate more accurately the size, composition, and location of the Japanese forces opposing them.

AD HOC GROUP

The Scout missions in the Philippines were not limited to static surveillance, for General Krueger had a number of priority intelligence requirements that could be satisfied only by a human intelligence collection element. For further campaign planning, his staff needed data on roads and bridges, mountain trail networks, and Japanese installations well beyond the forward edge of the battle area (FEBA) and the reach of normal ground patrols. The Scouts successfully performed many such missions for their commander, clearly demonstrating the value of a well-trained reconnaissance team to a senior staff.

The various missions performed by the Alamo Scouts throughout their existence cannot be discussed without mentioning the few but generally successful direct-action operations they carried out. Among these were two friendly hostage and prisoner rescue operations. The first was conducted in New Guinea by the Scouts acting alone. The second was executed in the Philippines where the Scouts served as the advanced reconnaissance element for the 6th Ranger Battalion on a mission that resulted in the dramatic liberation of more than 500 survivors of the Bataan Death March.

The Scouts were also used for a variety of missions for which no other organization was available. Such missions included recommending and directing deep air strikes, determining the location of key Japanese personalities, and locating and retrieving downed Allied air crews. Still, their main focus was intelligence collection.

Through experience, the Alamo Scouts learned the value of appropriate mission planning and preparation. They learned that attention to detail was absolutely essential. Once the Scouts were inserted behind enemy lines, faulty equipment, communication failures, and incompletely considered contingencies could all be deadly.

Upon receipt of a mission, each team was briefed by the special intelligence subsection of the Sixth Army's G-2 section. This briefing included a description of the area of operations, an analysis of the tactical situation in the area, and a statement of the commander's intelligence requirements. To help the teams evaluate the information they gathered, they were provided with the enemy situation and order of battle in as much detail as possible. The G-2 topographical section was responsible for providing up-to-date terrain information and analysis. This included aerial photographs, maps, and terrain studies of the area in which the Scouts would be operating.

Each team was given signal operation instructions (SOI) for its particular mission. Primary and alternate radio stations and schedules of contact were determined, and all radio equipment was issued and thoroughly inspected by the G-2's radio repair and maintenance subsection. Spare radio parts were on every team's packing list, and all the operators were capable of making minor equipment repairs in the field. No detail of the communications plan was left unchecked.

During the initial operations, which were of short duration (three to five days), the teams used only lightweight voice radio sets to communicate with the extraction party. Later, when they were employed on longer missions in areas where the native population was friendly, they had to have sets capable of operating at ranges from 50 to 3,000 miles. Scouts usually used the SCR-300 (FM) radio for internal communications and linkups and the SCR-694 (AM) radio for the transmission of information. Transmissions were secured by a double transposition cypher, the equivalent of today's one-time pads.

PRIORITY REQUIREMENTS

When the standard signal and repair procedures were found insufficiently responsive to scout requirements, an ad hoc radio maintenance and supply group was formed before the Luzon Campaign. This organization consisted of an officer and several technicians who had been radio engineers in civilian life. The Philippine Army's 92d Division, a guerrilla organization on newly liberated Leyte, provided the personnel. This small group ensured that communications equipment was prepared for field operations and completely checked and reconditioned all the radio equipment when the mission was completed. Many Scout team radio operators for the Luzon Campaign came from this division.

Radio repair parts were also provided by the radio maintenance and supply group, but other supplies, including medical items, were handled by the special intelligence subsection. Because supplies for the Scouts were maintained by the G-2, resupply items were generally either airdropped or airlanded within 24 hours of a request. Small supply dumps and caches were used in areas under guerrilla control Large amounts of needed supplies were coordinated by the special intelligence subsection through the Army G-4.

The usual armament for the teams consisted of Thompson submachineguns, carbines, hand grenades, and hunting knives. They needed lightweight yet rapid-fire weapons to help them break any contact they might encounter. Team leaders conducted showdown inspections of all the individual and team equipment required for the operation. Shortages were made up with supplies maintained by the G-2 for that purpose

Simultaneously with these preparations, coordination was conducted to infiltrate the teams into the objective area. Although various techniques were used, amphibious infiltration was the norm. PT boats, landing craft, Catalina flying boats, and submarines were all used to get the teams within range of their targets, and inflatable rubber boats were commonly used. Later in the campaign, C-47 and L-5 aircraft were employed, but generally their use was restricted to resupply missions.

The means of infiltration depended largely on a mission's requirements and availability of resources. When guerrilla reception committees were to be used, as in the Philippines, the necessary arrangements were made for recognition signals, security, and linkup at the infiltration site.

For the most part, all of these arrangements were made by the Army's special intelligence subsection. This freed the teams to focus their attention on preparing for a mission, and enabled them to be ready to go within 48 hours after a mission was given to them.

The Scout teams did not always operate only in support of Army headquarters. When an upcoming operation was to be the responsibility of a lower echelon, for instance, Alamo Scout teams were frequently attached to the headquarters that needed the information. This procedure was first used with I Corps during the Hollandia Campaign. An Alamo Scout

Group of three teams (later four) under the command of an Alamo Scout officer was attached to the corps G-2. The Scout officer served as the contact (liaison) officer for Scout employment and advised the G-2 on the capabilities, limitations, and administrative needs of the Scouts. When the Scouts were used, he monitored the status and operations of the Scouts, thereby insuring that an interested party was available at higher headquarters to anticipate the needs of the Scouts and provide assistance to the teams in the field.

The Alamo Scout team leaders learned many lessons from their operations, a number of which seem applicable to today's LRSU units.

THEATER SPECIFIC

First, a training program should be established that is specific to the potential theater of deployment. A school based in the continental United States can provide the basics, but cannot meet all of the training requirements. Theater orientation will have a significant effect on everything from infiltration techniques to intelligence training such as determining enemy order of battle.

Special training is needed in communications, medical, and fire support skills (especially close air support). Cross-training is especially important. All team members must be thoroughly trained in intelligence skills and must be able, at least to a limited extent, to analyze, interpret, and determine the importance of the information they gather. It also allows them to cut down the number of radio transmissions they must make and lessens their communications time and signature.

Absolute top physical fitness was required by the Scouts and should be required for all LRSU team members. Soldiers who have shouldered a rucksack with a SATCOM or HF radio and a week's worth of batteries will attest to the truth of this statement. Physical fitness training, however, should be keyed to employment considerations. For example, a LRSU team in the Pacific might orient its physical training toward swimming skills while a team in southern Germany might focus on marching through rugged terrain with mission loads, or on climbing skills.

At the same time, all mission and individual equipment should be carefully considered by weight and function. Weapons and other armament should be lightweight and should offer maximum initial firepower and versatility. The Alamo Scouts carried carbines and Thompson submachineguns, both of which were lightweight rapid-fire weapons. Silenced firearms were requested for the point men. Occasionally, the teams also carried a 60mm mortar without its bipod and sight; they used a plumb bob and a makeshift quadrant for aiming. (Today's equivalent would probably be the M203 grenade launcher.) Both fragmentation and smoke grenades were common to the packing list. Even today the hand grenade, by virtue of its versatility, small size, and relatively light weight, is an attractive alternative to the bulkier claymore mine.

Food was not given much consideration. Initially, the teams carried too much food and found that the extreme tension of operating behind enemy lines significantly decreased their appetites. Later, during missions of longer duration, the teams subsisted on guerrilla rations or foraged for their food. Foraging, of course, is a theater-specific skill that requires training. It also requires time that takes away from the mission.

In cases where cultivated crops are available, foraging must be carefully considered, because a neutral or hostile population will notice it and may report it. Even where the population is friendly, a random pilfering of crops is likely to create resentment and impair future cooperation.

The single most important items of equipment (and the ones that contribute the most weight) are team radios. Communications are indeed the lifeblood of today's LRSU team. Without communications the team is not only useless but is also in extreme danger, because it can neither communicate information nor request support. Both short range (intra-team) and long range (reporting) systems are generally required. Communications must be structured to the mission, though, and depending on the length and purpose of the mission, short range sets may be the only requirement.

The minimum allowable number should be carried but there should be some redundancy. Spare components should be carried for parts that are frequently broken (RF cables, headsets, fuses). Spare radios may be taken in and then cached. The secure system must also have a manual backup (such as a one-time pad) in case the secure device malfunctions. Plans for automatic resupply of spare communications equipment may be prearranged and employed under certain criteria (for example, if the team misses two consecutive communication checks).

Care must also be taken to limit damage in the event the team is captured or compromised. This can be accomplished through proper planning. Special CEOIs must be used that do not compromise those of larger units. Predetermined code words or other procedures designed to signify that a station is operating under duress must be employed. Finally, if all else fails, there must be a jointly coordinated survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) plan.

SUPPORT LIAISON

One final note of caution. A LRSU supporting another unit or attached to a subordinate headquarters should not automatically expect support. The LRSU should assume nothing and check everything. A knowledgeable LRSU liaison officer or NCO located at the controlling headquarters is essential to the effectiveness and safety of the team. His duties should include coordinating support and monitoring field operations. It is also a good idea for him to accompany teams to the drop-off point during infiltration and to be in charge of the contact party during linkup and extraction.

A number of factors that directly influence the effectiveness of LRSUs, however, are beyond the control of a detachment or company commander, because they are generally within the authority of a senior commander or staff officer.

One of these involves the selection of personnel. If a high standard of performance is expected, then a strict personnel selection process must be used. Completing the Ranger course

or the LRSU course does not guarantee that a soldier is a good reconnaissance man.

As with the Alamo Scouts, the initial selection should be based on the characteristics of the individual, not on his MOS or former unit. A careful balance of youth, maturity, and experience is required. The composition of the Alamo Scout team was a perfect example of this principle. A junior officer—together with five or six enlisted men, two of whom were middle grade NCOs—provided a good balance. An MOS did not enter into the process.

Recent evidence indicates that good reconnaissance personnel fit a certain psychological profile. This stands to reason since, except in rare circumstances, teams must be trained to totally avoid contact. A corollary to this is that people who like to "kick in doors and break things" rarely make the best reconnaissance and surveillance men.

Great individual soldiers do not automatically make good team members. Cohesiveness must be attained as a prerequisite to teamwork—each soldier must have complete confidence in his teammates. For this reason, COHORT LRSU teams may be an attractive option for the future. Using the same selection process as the Alamo Scout Training Center did, teams could undergo training and selection simultaneously. Those who were not selected for LRSU duty might be considered top candidates for scout duty with infantry battalions.

A final note on team composition. If the situation allows, consideration should be given to providing indigenous personnel to the teams as guides and interpreters. This normally requires prior planning and training, though, because a team is normally a close knit organization.

A senior commander and his G-2 must give the teams focus by helping them develop their mission essential task list (METL) for a specific theater. Certainly the training for VII Corps LRSU teams would be different from that for I Corps teams, because the potential conditions of METT-T are significantly different. A LRSU team that is trained to support a heavy corps fighting against a Warsaw Pact opponent is not likely to be skilled in reconnoitering beaches and landing zones. Nor is it likely to be familiar with insurgent characteristics and tactics. Conversely, teams from light divisions and contingency corps may not fully understand the requirements of heavy units.

To make these unit requirements easier to understand, General Krueger employed a training technique seldom seen in today's Army. He was frequently accompanied by Alamo Scouts when visiting his subordinate units, or when observing combat operations. This procedure offered three significant benefits. First, the Scouts got to know the subordinate staffs in preparation for a possible future attachment. In this way they avoided being just unknown faces; they developed an understanding of subordinate unit personalities, contacts, and requirements; and they laid the groundwork for future cooperation. Second, these opportunities allowed the Scouts to comprehend the "big picture" and fully understand the concerns and intent of their commander. Finally, through contact with their commander, they developed a personal loyalty that further increased their reliability and determination in difficult circumstances.

Infiltration techniques must be simple, reliable, and flexible. Complicated infiltration plans and exotic methods are usually unnecessary, require more training time than is justified, and beg for failure. Emphasis should be placed on the infiltration means that are reasonably available within the theater.

The length of any particular mission should be given careful consideration. As a general rule, the length of Alamo Scout missions was a function of the sympathy of the people in the area. If the population was hostile, neutral, or unknown, the missions were of short duration, and contact was absolutely avoided. But once the Scouts deployed in the Philippines where there was active resistance to the Japanese, contact with civilians ceased to be a great danger and longer missions, occasionally for a month or more, were the rule.

When planning the length of a mission, other significant factors should also be taken into consideration. The schedule must allow enough time for moving to the objective site or observation post. Because its combat power is limited, a team does not move at the pace of a rifle company. Its only protection is stealth, and stealth requires time. In the objective area, a careful balance must be achieved between the probability of compromise and the time required for the team to execute its collection tasks. If compromise would significantly affect combat operations, then only a short time should be spent in the objective area. On the other hand, if detailed information is required, enough time must be allowed for collecting it.

Alamo Scout support to the 6th Ranger Battalion's prisoner of war rescue mission at Pangatian, Luzon, is a good example of the way these factors interact. Infiltrated only slightly ahead of the Rangers and after joining forces with Philippine guerrillas, the Scouts, in the brief time allowed, could not come up with the detailed information required for planning a successful raid—determining guard and prisoner schedules, billeting locations, and troop strength. Consequently, when the 6th Ranger Battalion arrived, the information was incomplete, and this forced a 24-hour delay while the Scouts completed their reconnaissance. Fortunately, the delay was not significant, since the unit was operating in conjunction with native guerrillas and a supportive population that significantly reduced the possibility of compromise. One day later, with all of the required information in hand, the 6th Ranger Battalion launched its famous liberation raid.

Who should control LRSU teams? Today's doctrine says the G-2 should be in charge; the combat experience of the Alamo Scouts verifies this concept. The G-2 section should handle the most important aspects of team planning and receive the collected information, and it should be structured to support all of a LRSU's requirements from radio support to supplies.

The G-2 section assisted by the G-3 must coordinate staff support to make sure the teams are adequately prepared. A detachment or company commander cannot do this; he is too junior and lacks the authority to task others to help him. Particular attention must be focused on staff support and briefings in the areas of intelligence, communications, supply, infiltration, and exfiltration. Thorough preparation is critical to mission success.

A final note that may stir some controversy. LRSUs can be used for many missions other than identifying the "second echelon." This is especially true for the units in light divisions and contingency corps. Small teams can and should be employed in reconnaissance work as opposed to strictly surveillance work. The intelligence a light force commander needs can seldom be gathered from a static position. LRSUs can conduct deep reconnaissance of landing zones, beachheads, drop zones, and raid targets, and provide terminal guidance for air strikes and interdiction fires.

Each of these missions was executed by small bands of well-trained Alamo Scouts operating at the high end of the spectrum of conflict against a tenacious and determined foe. And they were executed with such success that in more than 80 such missions, not a single Alamo Scout was killed or captured. These missions were performed to such a high standard that General Krueger was prompted to remark at the end of the war that "this little outfit has never failed the Sixth Army."

Can today's LRSU teams achieve such a high degree of success in such a wide variety of missions? Certainly the human element is the same today as it was in 1943. If anything, today's soldier is better educated and more attuned to the technology used in modern reconnaissance and surveillance operations. With proper selection, training, and equipment, we should expect at least as good a return on our investment.

For an example of what can be expected, we need only look to the record of the Alamo Scouts, a group of young men who achieved incredible results against an enemy who was noted for his stealth and cunning.

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